

Empowering the Subaltern:

A Study of Arundhati Roy's Nonfictional Works

Dissertation

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Javeed Ahmad Dar

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Dr G R Mir



Post-Graduate Department of English

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CERTIFICATE

This dissertation titled “*Empowering the Subaltern: A Study of Arundhati Roy’s Nonfictional Works*” submitted by **Javeed Ahmad Dar** in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of **Master of Philosophy (M Phil)** in English, is an independent and original piece of research work carried out under my supervision. This research work has not been submitted, in part or in full, to any university/ institute for any degree. The candidate has fulfilled all the statutory requirements for the submission of this dissertation.

Supervisor

Dr G R Mir

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Introduction

Arundhati Roy is indisputably one of the most prominent writers writing in English. Both her fiction and nonfiction have made a permanent mark on the Anglophone literary landscape. After the publication of her only novel *The God of Small Things* (1997), she has produced many collections of essays which have particularly been appreciated by grassroots activists and intellectuals. Her innovative use of the English language has enabled her to capture the basic rhythms of the common people who are victimized for their innocence. Because of her acute sensitivity to controversial issues of great social importance, she enjoys a sustained and growing visibility in the publishing world. She figures both in traditional print media and websites. In the United States alone, her works have sold some 60,000 copies. The literariness of her essays entitles her to be read as a genuine prose writer as the distinction between the literary and the journalistic has largely been eroded due to the changes that have occurred in information technology.

Arundhati Roy's representation of marginalized voices is clear, fearless, consistent in its concern and scathing in its criticism of political institutions. She raises many vital questions in her

nonfictional works which are directly connected with the problem of marginalization. The people she talks about are not epic heroes or heroines but *adivasis*, *dalits*, suppressed women and helpless children. In fact millions of them have been displaced by the construction of dams and industries, a man-made human tragedy she cannot digest. She exposes the growing threat of corporate power, unmitigated casteism, communal politics and the exploitation of natural resources by the state and corporate agents.

Roy criticizes the west for its unbridled materialism which is responsible for existing upheavals throughout the world. Fed up with the nexus between big corporations and the political elite, she thinks that such relationships turn yesterday's close allies into today's worst enemies. According to her, the so-called war on terror by the west is a myth forged to devour and dominate other voices. As a social activist, she discusses the strategies of resistance and creates a sense of unity that brings the marginalized voices under a single goal.

In her first collection of essays entitled *The Algebra of Infinite Justice* (2002) she speaks with clarity and conscience against nuclear weapons. She further exposes the myth of the misuse of power by the big corporates in the form of flawed dam

policies. “Progress” is the new slogan through which the common masses are deprived of the wealth of their own lands.

In her second collection of essays entitled *Listening to Grasshoppers* (2009), she takes a hard look at India, the world’s so-called largest democracy. In this book she talks about how Muslims in Gujarat were subjected to genocide in 2002. She raises questions about how justice is delivered and denounces all tyrannies that were inflicted on the victims.

At the international level she shows in this collection that democracy means to subjugate and suppress the globe by the superpowers like America and its allies. In her third collection of essays entitled *An Ordinary Persons Guide to Empire* (2004) she re-emphasizes western hypocrisy and propaganda that stems from biased international politics. In this anthology she reveals the tactics and techniques to identify and expose the invisible existence of a corporate empire and then deconstructs it by assigning a radical role to media, institutions and intellectuals. Her unique way of dealing with the burning issues of the contemporary world has attracted many critics to write books and critical essays on her. Attempts have also been made to analyze her entire output in the light of current theoretical formulations.

As several books have been written on Arundhati Roy's nonfictional works, Depika Bahri's *Native Intelligence* (2003). It forcefully demonstrates that we are overlooking not only an essential aspect of her works but even a critical perspective on what they project. *The Checkbook and the Cruise Missile: Conversations with Arundhati Roy* (2004) by David Barsamian is a collection of interviews conducted over a two-year period. It focuses on her role as an activist and topics range from the political and the literary to the social and the environmental. The book also highlights the influence of money and military buildup in India that she has continuously protested. The interviews are informal and reflect her political opinions about corrupt politicians destroying her native country.

In his *Indian English Poetry and Fiction: Critical Elucidations* (2005) A N Prasad Rajiv presents a commentary on the merits of Roy's art. The author has shown her satirical skills and the targets she generally attacks are arrogance, dominance of the establishment, nuclear arms proliferation and their destructive power. It clearly argues that she is not in favour of war and killings but represents the true and bitter reality of the world. Besides, the author talks about her theory of writing which emphasises that

writers should be the true voice of a nation. They should not hesitate to expose corruption and aberration of the society in which they live. *Globalizing Dissent* (2009) edited by Ranjan Ghosh, a collection of critical essays, reveals that Roy is not only an accomplished writer but equally gifted in unraveling the politics of globalization, the power and ideology of corporate culture, fundamentalism, terrorism, and other issues gripping the present-day world. In this volume prominent scholars have examined her creative activism and participation in global politics.

As most of these critics have dealt with their pertinent themes, none of them has however tackled the issue of the subaltern exhaustively. The need to choose this aspect of her nonfictional works for my M phil project entitled “Empowering the Subaltern: A Study of Arundhati Roy’s Nonfictional Works” has arisen from this neglect. As such, the dissertation consists of three chapters with an introduction and a conclusion preceding and following them respectively. A thorough analysis of her nonfictional works has been done in three main chapters to show how she challenges state hegemony and corporate globalization, which she thinks, are responsible for the deprivation of the subaltern. The first chapter deals with the causes and effects of

marginalization. In the second chapter the emphasis is on why and how modern democracy facilitates oppressive forces to dominate. The third chapter has its focus on analyzing how she comes up with some practical techniques and strategies to resist and denounce all suppressive forces with the help of certain powerful institutions and movements like media, universities, and social activism. The introduction briefly mentions her major themes and techniques and also offers a survey of the scholarship available on her works. The conclusion, followed by a select bibliography, is based on the findings and inferences which have been derived from my study of her nonfictional works.

Chapter 1

The Algebra of Infinite Justice: Causes of Marginalization

Marginalization is a social process of becoming or being made marginal especially as a group within the larger society. The term refers to a segment of the population that occupies the lowest possible position in a class hierarchy. Through this process particular groups and nations are neglected or relegated to the sidelines of social negotiation, political debate and economic bargaining. The historical criterion to marginalize is generally socio-political and economic. As it turns out, the common people inhabit a socio-political environment that is often quite hostile to them. In addition, the state and the market have their own reasons for marginalizing the commons. Both are hungry for revenues that come from exploiting the masses and both find it useful to support each other.

Many communities, particularly aboriginal, experienced marginalization due to political negligence and social discrimination. In the present era elite and big corporates are politically and economically strong. Their self-centered

maneuverings arbitrarily lead to the marginalization of smaller communities. These marginalized communities lose their land, their sources of income, and are excluded from the socio-political and economic spheres. Moreover, they lose their culture and values through forced assimilation. Today various communities and countries continue to be marginalized due to the development of practices, policies and programmes that meet the needs of powerful nations and not the needs of the weak.

Arundhati Roy in her collection of essays entitled the *Algebra of Infinite Justice* shows that material deprivation is the most common cause of marginalization. Natural resources like forests, minerals and other natural products are unfairly dispersed in society. The essays reveal that even individuals and minority groups are excluded from services, programmes and policies. Globalization or global-capitalism has led to forced displacement which prohibits their access to resources and services. So marginalization is primarily caused by socio-political and economic factors. In this sense it means loss of control over one's existence. On the contrary, lack of participation naturally leads and has led to division in which one class or country has control over the means of production of the other.

For Roy even globalization has contributed to marginalization in many ways. As companies are outsourcing, the cost of living continues to rise. Jobs are lost and land is expropriated by large companies. The poverty line is marked/ reduced/ registered by the state authorities to lower figures in order to mask the number of masses who actually live in wretched poverty.

Roy's concept of marginalization is neither religious nor based on class consciousness. She preaches a universal religion of humanity where there is no creed, no nation, no colour and class. As such, her audience is not limited. Kalpana Sharma, while commenting on her, says,

Roy's essays have reached an audience which any number of well-argued erudite pieces appearing on the editorial pages of main stream newspapers would not have reached.

(Sharma 2011: 31)

She resists and denounces all tyrannies, pleads for their elimination and questions the tragic both at individual and collective levels. She calls herself 'the citizen of earth' and does not seem to belong to any country or state. She is a kind of 'free

citizen of the world'. She lends force to the voice of the marginal sects like *Maoists*, *Advasis* and minorities. She is against American oppression in countries like Iraq or Afghanistan.

Her essays show her pleading for the betterment of the oppressed and work as a scathing criticism against the oppressor. She raises basic structural problems which have led to the exploitation of the weaker by the stronger. She begins with the notion that by providing a minimal amount of welfare support, a group or a country will be free from marginalization. In fact the weaker sects are forced to accept a system where social stigma and stereotyping play havoc with the lives of the masses. She targets big corporations like Vedanta, Carlyle group and other such companies which use their power to deprive the common people of their basic rights. This collection also highlights how deterioration of political and security systems within the country affects its people adversely. She exposes how international wars are manufactured in general and domination of the globe by America in particular.

Since America is the most dominant force in determining international politics, its policies have paved the way for the marginalization of the third world. According to Roy, American foreign policy claims that it is right to use military force anywhere

in the world if its interests are threatened. No other country in modern history, not even the Nazi Germany, has ever resorted to such global hegemony. In order to dominate the world, the US government asserts the right to bomb and destroy any country it chooses. It refuses to respect as a matter of international law the sovereignty of any other country and reserves the right to get rid of any regime in any part of the world. The US national security strategy is based on a distinctly American internationalism that reflects the union of its values and national interests. It is a distinct sort of internationalism that proclaims that what is good for America is good for the world. The American nexus with the World Bank has been sponsoring privatization programmes in the marginalized countries. It enabled western capitalists to acquire ownership and gain control of a large share of the economy of the former eastern bloc countries. The development of America's war machine is meant to enlarge America's domain of influence. Such marginalization supports the conquest of new economic frontiers and imposition of the free market system world-wide.

As Roy is more bothered about the ethical dimension of America marginalizing other nations, its foreign policy is based on 'might is right'. It is widely argued that after the 9/11 attacks the world has dramatically changed and nothing will be the same as it

has entered into what is called the 'age of terror'. Paradoxically, nobody knows who committed this act of terror on 9/11. On September 20 the FBI said it had doubts about the identities of some hijackers. On the contrary President Bush said, "We know exactly who the terrorists are and which government is supporting them" (Roy 2002: 220). As there are different versions of the heinous crime projected by various quarters, it becomes increasingly difficult to fix the responsibility. Perhaps the President was identifying America's old friend Afghanistan as being the new enemy. The American people also demanded an answer to the question why these terrorists hated them. For Bush such hatred is actually against the freedom Americans celebrate in all the spheres of life. Roy maintains that there is no substantial evidence to support such claims. The people of America must know that it is not they who are hated but their government's policies. For instance, when we look at the history of the Taliban, it appears that they are a product of America and Pakistan. It is America and Pakistan's ISI that launched the CIA's largest covert operation since the Vietnam War against the USSR. Their purpose was to strength the holy war of Islamic *Jihad*. As a result, people like Osama were being created by the CIA and wanted by the FBI. In the course of time he had been promoted from suspect to prime

suspect and then, despite the lack of real evidence, to “the most wanted”, dead or alive. In this connection Roy says, “No authentic source of intelligence account was able to link Osama to the 9/11 attack” (Roy 2001: 235). The only incriminating piece of evidence against him is the fact that he has not criticized it. America can invade a country like Afghanistan for the demand of Osama but can do nothing about Warren Anderson who is responsible for the Bhopal gas tragedy that killed 16,000 people and is still free. Even India can watch as a silent spectator with all its authentic evidences against him. Justices for the families whose relatives were killed will never be delivered. It looks as if other countries do not exist on this earth. This is what marginalized countries are reduced to in one form or the other. Since the Second War America has launched wars against eighteen countries and probably the next target would be Iran. Chomsky in his book *Argumentative Chomsky*, has said,

The Bush administration perceives the new phase of the War on terror (which in many ways replicates ‘The War on Terror’ declared by the Reagan administration 20 year earlier) as an opportunity to expand its already overwhelming military advantage over the rest of the world, and to move on to other methods to ensure global dominance.

(Chomsky 2008: 345)

Similarly Roy is skeptical about the free world America talks about. In her essay “War Is Peace” she shows that the freedom of speech, religion, and thought may look well within the borders of America but outside its borders it turns out to be the freedom to dominate, humiliate and subjugate. She is very incisive in this and says, “We know that infinite justice for some means infinite injustice for others, and enduring freedom for some means enduring subjugation for others” (*Roy 2002: 245*).

The other aspect of war on terror is the way America conducts its business with the rest of the world. It is framed in such a way as to enable it to loot raw material like oil and minerals from other countries to safeguard its domination. The United States government wants economic control and exploitation of the huge oil and mineral wealth of the Middle East and the Central Asia, and if perpetual world war is needed to achieve this it would be a welcome gesture. George Bush’s remark is significant in this connection. He says, “When I take action, I am not going to fire a \$ 2 million missile at a ten-dollar empty tent and hit a camel in the butt. It’s going to be decisive” (*Roy 2002:256*). But for Roy there are no costly targets in Afghanistan which will give his missiles their money’s worth. America does not invent cheaper missiles to target cheaper lives in the poor countries to maintain its grip on

them indefinitely. The war on Iraq, also referred to as the occupation of Iraq, was just an excuse to control Iraqi oil. Prior to the invasion, both governments, American and British, asserted that it was possible for Iraq to use weapons of mass destruction (WMD) threatening their security. As a matter of fact, Saddam's government gave its full cooperation to The United Nations Monitoring Commission for verifying the weapons of mass destruction, but no evidence pointed to the existence of such weapons. This nullified Bush's claim that he would end a brutal regime whose aggression and weapons of mass destruction make it a unique threat to the world. Iraq was also linked to the Al-Qaeda in order to legitimate war on it. According to *The Washington Post*, "It's clear now that the press as a whole didn't do a very good job in challenging administration claims". Similarly *The New York Times* acknowledged that pre-war reporting was flawed (*Danny 2004: Global Vision*). So the Bush administration invaded Iraq on the false claims of the WMD.

For Roy America used the shield of 9/11 to legitimate its war on Iraq and Afghanistan for controlling their natural resources. Such wars are launched only to satisfy America's corporate greed. Big politicians like Dick Cheney, the Vice President of America, harvested \$900 millions for rebuilding of Iraq. Other offences

committed under this shield were the destruction of basic infrastructure, killing of at least 15100 civilians while only 2977 civilians were killed in the 9/11 attack. America cannot stop its war on the globe. If it happens, then the fate of the coalition's oil companies and manufacturers of weapons would be sealed. It would not have any meaning for the companies like Halliburton and the Carlyle group, one of the largest private investment companies, which make money from wars. Such companies are run by the big guns like US Defense Secretary Frank Carlucci, who is the chairman and managing director of the Carlyle group. In the essay "War is Peace" Roy says,

America has always viewed oil as a security consideration and protected it by any means it deems necessary. Few of us doubt that its military presence in the gulf has little to do with its concern for human rights and almost entirely to do with its strategic interest in Oil.

(Roy 2002:158)

So it is not difficult to see that the wars on Iraq and Afghanistan is a way of conducting real business for the companies like The Carlyle group and Halliburton. Roy in her other essay "Animal farm II" also points to the arms race into which America is plunging the globe.

As regards the Indian national scenario, Roy states that the policies of the Indian government within its states are no different from that of the policies of the US at the international level. India being the world's largest democracy holds no future to its poor and minorities. The common people are deprived of basic rights. They ultimately bear the brunt of foolish political decisions of corrupt politicians, whether it is the decision of nuclear blasts in Pokhram or fissured dam policies in most of its states. It is the elite class of the society and the big corporates like Vedanta who determine what is good and what is bad for the millions of the marginalized people.

In most of the states in India the common people have been marginalized at all levels of their existence. Her essays project the real plight of the masses in general and the minorities in particular. In "The End of the Imagination" she criticizes Indian fever for nuclear weapons when in actuality millions of people in the country lack basic necessities. According to her, there is no need of having nuclear arsenal when the common people are dying due to the scarcity of water, food and shelter. Revealing in concrete images the horrors and devastating consequences of a would-be nuclear holocaust, she asserts that the race of nuclear weapons between India and Pakistan is ultimately the race of death for

millions of people. Any sort of war will not just be a war of one country against another country or territory versus territory, rather one prime target would be our part of the earth itself. She says, “Our cities and forests, our fields and villages will burn for days. Rivers will turn to poison; the air will become the fire. The wind will spread the flames” (*Roy 2001: 6*). We cannot forget the wrath of nuclear weapons dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki which exposed the generations that followed to a nuclear winter and many dreadful diseases. She criticizes the race for nuclear weapons as “Our planet will bristle with the beautiful missiles” (*Roy 2001: 10*).

While looking at the human cost Roy is of the opinion that nuclear weapons have become a tool to rule nations and to marginalize the masses. It is the people who have everything at stake. They are being baffled by the fever of nationalism when in reality they are deprived of basic human rights. She further highlights that more than 400 million Indians are illiterate and live in abject poverty. Over 600 million lack basic sanitation and more than 200 million have no access to drinking water. A single nuclear bomb can satisfy these basic needs of millions of such people. It does not therefore make sense of having nuclear weapons when the people are dying of thirst and starvation. On 20 January 2002 Tony Blair’s Peace Mission was actually a business trip to sell Hawk

fighter bombers to India. The price of a single bomber could provide one and a half million people with clear drinking water for life. Roy pleads for the betterment of the down-trodden sects and criticizes the domestic policies of the Indian government.

Apart from nuclear weapons, she also throws light on the suffering of the common people caused by the construction of dams. In her essay “Power Politics” she exposes the defective policies of state governments for the construction of dams in India. She revived the anti-dam movement in 1990 when it was in a poor shape. Building huge dams has been almost a fetish of the Indian government since Nehru made the famous statement (Later regretted) that dams were “the temples of modern India”. The Hoover Dam was the original model for this kind of slogan. During the last fifty years as many as fifty million, mostly poor, low- caste Indians have lost their homes and livelihood as a consequence. The benefits go particularly to the urban rich and the poor are generally neglected. Accordingly the Sardar Sarovar Plan, to build 3200 dams on the Narmada River, which flows through three states in western India, is designed to be the biggest dam project of all in the country. Roy says that it will submerge and destroy 4,000 square kms of forestland, and displace hundreds of thousands of people and the governments that sell these projects to big corporates are

without adequate plans for relocation or compensation for the ones to be dislocated and thus rendered homeless.

The other odd aspect of this huge irrigation scheme is that it will benefit only one out of the three states; all sacrifices are to be made by villagers in the other two states. One of the most disturbing revelations in “Power Politics” against the dams is about the way Enron squeezed billions of dollars out of the state of Maharashtra for a power plant that most local industries cannot even afford to tap. Roy says that to privatize natural resources, including earth, water, air and forests, means to transfer productive public assets from the state to private companies and will deprive seven hundred million people of India from such natural resources. To privatize them means to put a price on every drop of water they drink, on every breath they breathe and on every natural product of forest which they own. To take these away and sell them as stock to private companies is a process of barbaric transactions on a scale which has no equals in history. For instance, the interest of the General Electric (GE) in the privatization of the power sector in India is quite evident from the words of its manager, Jack Welch, who recently on his visit to India said, “Don’t do it (privatization of the power sector) for GE’s sake, do it for yourselves” (*Roy: 155*). Because this is the only solution to digitalize one billion people of

India, the power politics behind it, like other private companies, is that there are four such corporations that dominate the production of power generation equipments in the world. Their aim is to sell equipment which can generate 20,000 megawatts of power. However there is no demand in their own countries for such equipment. The only options they are left with are the third world countries like India and China and their big markets. The demand of power-generating equipment in these two countries is too high because the need per year is 10,000 megawatts. Amitava Kumar in his critical essay “The Currency of Arundhati Roy” says,

The successful enter into Faustian contract: they sell their souls to fame and become its servitor. Roy did not. On the Narmada issue, as after the nuclear tests, Roy has chosen to go against the popular grain. Her words have contested the pious dogma of the business-as-usual, safari suited, bureaucracy-cum-political establishment as well as its supporters. When asked why she had joined the people’s movement against the building of the Narmada dam, she is reported to have said that she had seen everything she touched turning into silver coins. It was now time for paying back what she had received from the people.

(Kumar 2011: 30)

Thus the fever of privatization in India is geared to serve personal or corporate interests. In 1948 J Nehru said about the Hirakund dam that if the common people are to suffer they should suffer in the interest of country. What is alarming is that the dams higher than fifteen meters from the foundation to the crest play havoc with the ecosystem and in many instances result in the uprooting of entire communities, destroying their livelihood and prospects for a future. Despite the fact that big dams have a bleak environmental, economic and social record, construction is easily justified on paper. Big dams look good especially for the elites of a country pursuing a western style development agenda. Flood control, irrigation, hydropower navigation and recreations are key selling commodities in India. But dam proponents and planners usually inflate the potential benefits of these projects which at the end of the day either turn out to be unsatisfactory or false. For example, the initial survey of the water present in the Narmada River was 27.22million acre feet (MAF) but in 1992 the figure was 22.69MAF. This means 5% less than reported earlier. They stress the ‘environmental friendly’ low cost energy and downplay adverse impacts. The proponents promised improved lifestyle for the people affected by such dams, but inevitably they failed to fully consider the rights and interests of those whose ancestral lands

came within the development zone. While summing up Roy's attitude to this despicable situation, Bishnupriya Ghosh in her essay "Tallying Bodies: The Moral Math of Arundhati Roy's Non-Fiction" observes,

Roy sees the Indian state as increasingly violent towards those who live within its territory, an "undeclared civil war" that knows no boundaries. Quite characteristically, the Indian example is a microcosm of a global phenomenon. Justice is the privilege of elites: by contrast, the poor are offered "human rights" that are seldom legally enforced either by nations or by the international community.

(Priya 2011: 136)

Roy regrets the callous attitude of different governments because they never seek prior informed consent of native inhabitants of the land and in many cases there is little or no consideration for the poor farmers whose land is taken for the construction of dams. The rehabilitation costs for the dislocated people are very often inadequately estimated by the state management. The Sardar Sarovars Resettlement and Rehabilitation (R &R) package on paper is just and generous, yet the principal reason for opposition to the dam is the rehabilitation policy of one million people who would be displaced by this project. The dam

was never planned with the intention of providing drinking water to the people living around it. Instead the number of families that were displaced by it was 85000 rather than the official figure which is 12000. Similarly there is a disparity between facts and official claims, so far as its power generation capacity is concerned. Roy constantly claims that it is the most marginalized sectors of society which are made to sacrifice themselves and their ways of life for the supposed greater good. The poor subsidize the rich.

Moreover, the environmental implications are so extensive that it has been often described as 'India's greatest planned environmental disaster'. It violates several Indian laws protecting the environment. A huge area of rich forest, wetlands and wildlife habitate gets destroyed by the construction of large dams. It will submerge 14,000 hectares of forest, seriously disrupt ecosystem both upstream and downstream and threaten with extinction of Marsh crocodile. It will also destroy the most productive Hilsa Fishery in India and the giant fresh water prawn, and adversely affect other types of aquatic life. Roy in her essay "The Greater Common Good" condemns this state of affairs in very blatant terms:

Big dams are to a nation's development what nuclear bombs are to its military arsenal. They are both weapons of mass destruction. They are both weapons governments used to control their own people. Both 20th century emblems that mark a point in time when human intelligence has outstripped its own instinct for survival. They're both malignant indications of civilization turning upon itself. They represent the severing of the link, not just the link-the understanding between human beings and the planet they live on. They scramble the intelligence that connects eggs to hens, milk to cows, food to forest, water to rivers, air to life and the earth to human existence.

(Roy 2002: 136-137)

So in her anthology *The Algebra of Infinite Justice* Roy represents a comprehensive picture of the factors which lead to the marginalization of the subaltern. She not only describes the adverse effects of industrial greed, destructive dam planning and eco-feminism but also underscores the plight of displaced farmers and workers who are forced to live in slums with no future.

Chapter II

Listening to Grasshoppers: A Critique of Democracy

Democracy has been defined by many theorists in many ways. The most prominent among them are Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau. Hobbes not only championed absolute sovereignty but also developed some of the fundamentals of European liberal thought. In his view all legitimate political power must be representative and based on the consent of people. This leaves people free to do whatever the law does not explicitly forbid. As the founder of modern political philosophy, his emphasis was on social contract which is still one of the major topics of political philosophy in the contemporary world.

John Locke, another advocate of democracy is known as the father of liberalism. His philosophy has its focus on the relationship between individual and society. He is of the view that social contract, nature and freedom should coexist to form a unified whole. He believes that individual is naturally free and becomes a political subject out of free choice. He also championed the possession of property as any physical or tangible entity that is

owned by a person or by a group of people or a legal entity like a corporation. He argues that individual ownership of goods and property is justified by the labour exerted to produce those goods or utilize property to produce goods beneficial to society. His labour theory of value explains that goods produced by nature are of little value unless combined with labour in their production and that labour is what gives them value. He believed that the ownership of property is created by the application of labour. He further proclaims that property precedes government and government cannot dispose of the estate of subjects arbitrarily. So labour done by the masses puts real value on the material world.

Rousseau tried to grasp the passionate side of man which he felt was left out of most previous philosophical thinking. In his essay “Discourse on the Arts and Science” (1750) he argued that the advancement of art and science had not been beneficial to mankind. He proposed that the progress of knowledge had made governments more powerful which ultimately crushed individual liberty. His important work *The Social Contract* (1762) describes the relationship of man with society. He claimed that nature without law or morality is brutish. In the state of nature, man is prone to be in frequent competition with his fellow men. He joins

together with his fellow men to form the collective human presence known as society. *The Social Contract* highlights the conditions for membership in society. He was one of the first modern writers to attack the institution of private property, and is considered the first advocate of modern socialism and communism. He emphasizes that the goal of government must be to secure equality, freedom, and justices for all within the state, regardless of the will of majority. If a state fails to act in a moral fashion it also fails to function in the proper manner and ceases to assert genuine authority over individuals.

Within the Asian context Jawaharlal Lal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi, who were well-versed in western political philosophy, championed the cause of democracy in their respective ways. Nehru, the first prime minister of India, advocated complete independence and democratic socialism. He once said that we must not forget that the important objective to be aimed at is to improve the quality of the electorate including individuals. His respect for democracy was borne out by the respect he gave to the opposition, the press and those with whom he disagreed. He rejected caste, religion and language for the unity of nation. He infused the spirit of tolerance and cooperation which was required for the proper

functioning of democracy. On the other hand, Mahatma Gandhi, usually known as the father of the nation, sees peace as the only possibility within a democratic system because people get connected with the system directly as well as indirectly at all levels. Democracy, according to him, provides maximum opportunities to people for progress and development. Above all, people can themselves decide the ways of their welfare. He wished for a stateless democracy fully based on non-violence. The crux of his democratic thought is healthy public opinion which can be cultivated only through better education. He emphasized cooperation of majority with minority to establish an ideal society completely free from exploitation.

Arundhati Roy has her own views on democracy. In her book *Listening To Grasshoppers* (2010) she ponders over the practical working of democracy both at national and international levels. She does not argue too much about the intellectual dimensions of democracy and its theoretical frameworks. Her concept of democracy does not foreground a utopia, she rather works out a mechanism that can enable nations to put to practice at least the basics of any democracy. While advocating the concept of proper ‘checks and balances’, she emerges as a political realist and

insists that such a mechanism should be kept in mind while deciding how natural resources have to be exploited. While settling long-standing disputes between states and regions, one should not lose sight of pragmatics. She defines democracy in common parlance as 'live and let live', besides upholding other associated practical needs as freedom, tolerance, justice and the like. She does not provide a new democratic theory, rather her focus is on facts and figures that show that there is a discrepancy between what is preached and what practiced within democracies.

In her essays she questions the false claims of modern democracy as it has nothing to do with the notion of freedom because it works more as a mask to hide the dreadful faces of greed, colour, creed and religion. It legitimizes the so-called progressivism and leads to the slow erosion of civil liberties and denial of day-to-day injustices. She uncovers the riddle of subterfuge and hypocrisy that covers the cold, calculated violence of the world's new super powers like India and America. The most captivating aspect of *Listening To Grasshoppers* is its brave and honest criticism of democracy. She says "The most wonderful thing about democracy is that it can mean anything you want it to mean" (Roy 2009: 4). Though she does not provide any viable

alternative, she demonstrates that democracy cannot perhaps be relied upon to deliver absolute justice and create stability we dream about.

In her essays “Animal Farm II” and “Introduction” she talks about many vital issues of international importance: practical working of American democracy at the international level, imposing sanctions and authoritarian use of power against the resistant nations. “Introduction” starts with the most interesting question about western liberal democracy and free market economy which have fused into a single predatory organism revolving around maximizing profits. While “Animal Farm II” is written in the form of a monologue, it presents George Bush as a character ridiculing himself in his own words. He is shown boastfully declaring Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the bigots in the Central Asia as democracies because General Musharaff has many votes and so do others, while Palestine is not a democracy because they vote for people like the Hamas. He goes to the extreme of grotesqueness when he says “Palestine’s not a democracy because they voted for people I don’t like. But India is my favorite democracy” (*Roy 2009: 108*). This piece of speech is supposed to have been delivered by G Bush within the four walls of Paran  Qila at Delhi

Zoo where his audience would be a few hundred caged animals along with some eminent people. The mocking tone deepens as he expresses apparently quite self-contradictory but true statements that America is trying hard to impose democracy on the world as per its own norms, and those who accept these norms as undemocratic are bound to perish. However the subtle tone finally surfaces with the flagrant truth that Roy puts in the mouth of the speaker,

I (Bush) hate terrorists because they think they have a right to kill people too. But when I was small, my mother and my grandmother – you say *naani* in Hindi, right! My mom and my *naani* told me that the only person who has the right to kill people, bomb countries and use chemical and biological weapons is the president of the United States. And guess who that is.

(Roy 2010:111)

In another essay “Listening To Grass-Hoppers: Genocide, Denial and Celebration” Roy talks about the current celebration of genocide in other parts of the world like Somalia. She looks at the contemporary world history more as a way to kill the masses and

ironically it is the masses who are described as the perpetrators. At least some of the patterns recurring in the historical process recounted by her have long been noted by people the world over. However her focus is on the nature and the mechanisms of genocide in its various forms. To her physical extermination of people by bombing and burning is not the only means to annihilate them but displacement and blocking access to food, water and shelter are equally damaging.

Besides presenting a comprehensive view of other national and international issues in her anthology, Roy digs deep into American government's misadventures of neo-liberal economic reforms that started in the early 1990s in India. Freedom may be an integral part of American democracy but it subjugates the rest of the world.

What Roy is actually doing is that she exposes the validity of the democratic principles in Bush's speech because they have nothing to do with reality, particularly Indian. She finds India's growing closeness with the United States not only vaguely humiliating but also dangerous. She is concerned about the long-term consequences of such a partnership. She concludes the essay on a note of indirect warning that Bush wishes to bomb Iran as he

had bombed Iraq for which he wishes that the Indian army could be deployed to execute such wars. For Roy the real designs of American democracy are shown by the aftermath of wars fought by America in order to establish democracy, particularly in the Middle East. She refers to the report published in *the Washington Post* which shows that one-third of the rapidly expanding cost of the Iraq war would go into private US bank accounts.

Similarly, Roy sides with the UN coordinator Holliday, who used the term genocide to describe the impact of the sanctions on Iraq which outdid Saddam. Apart from other things, it claimed lives of more than half a million children and the total number of civilians killed in Iraq from 1990 to 2003 rose upto 1.5million and the country is still burning in sectarian violence and car bombs. In fact it has become one of the safest hot beds for giving vent to the anti-American sentiment. Still no nation is able to do anything about this. In order to perpetuate its hegemony throughout the world, the US has already deployed its troops roughly in 140 nations. Even a *Time's Magazine* poll has revealed that eight out of ten Americans see the US as the world's greatest threat, whereas North Korea and Iran are very distant threats.

Roy's disgust for corporate globalization is quite evident in her essays. She brushes aside its promise of 'universal democracy' and *laissez-fair* because their realization demands an international confederation of loyal and corrupt regimes especially from the poor countries. These regimes, generally authoritarian, in the name of the so-called reforms, actually serve their own and the corporates's interests. And if resisted by the poor natives, mutinies are carried out and covered up under various frames. Not only this, the other strategy that is employed to delude the poor masses is to motivate and then confuse them by concocting a parallel discourse of information that erases the lines between the actual and the asserted. It helps to manufacture a world of endless speculations and insane 'dissemination'.

Roy states that the politics of genocide grow directly from multinational business enterprises. And there is no space for historical fact, forensic evidence or any sort of morality. It revolves around a geopolitics that is a fluctuating market for natural resources. In this mad march the poor are left with only one choice: to resist or to succumb. In today's privatized global march, freedom has nothing to do with humanism but a lot to do with new brands of "deodorants". Those who cannot consume do not matter.

It is called creating a good investment environment. The institutions of such democracy purposely create a schism between knowledge and information.

Roy's account of democracy within the Indian context is totally contrary to the ideal notions of democracy. According to her, even though democracy does not play a direct role in promoting corruption, yet it has given rise to an elite class which is selfish and pursues its own aims. She shows how the world's largest democracy (India) has had its ways of social justice eroded by unbridled growth, corporate greed, destruction of the environment, and a government runs by vested interests. She refers to India as the world largest "demon-crazy".

Similarly India uses its own tactics in order to subjugate its own poor people. In carrying out draconian plans, Roy stresses the Indian democratic machinery of judiciary, administration, and police just observe 'criminal silence' over the gross violation of basic human rights. In fact the police and the administration turn into killing apparatus while the multinational corporates are involved in eco-suicide and genocide of minorities

In her essay "How Deep shall We Dig" she highlights the general working of democracy with particular reference to the

Indian context. Draconian laws like the Prevention of Terrorist Act (POTA) and The Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (TADA) have, according to her, severely distorted democracy in India. These laws are used by the police to mask the heinous crimes they commit against the common people including torture in custody. Her position is collaborated by others as well. For instance, Seema Chisti sarcastically says in her article “Missing Muslim” published on 29 oct 2006 in *The Indian Express*, “The prison is the only place where minorities like Muslims are over-represented” (Chisti 2006: 3). In a report the Human Rights Commission in 2010 stated that India had significant human rights problem. It identified lack of accountability for security forces and police brutality, extra-judicial killings and torture as major problems. The United Nations in a report expressed concern that even human rights workers and their families were killed. They were tortured, ill-treated, and arbitrarily arrested on false charges for their legitimate work in upholding human rights and fundamental freedom. Apart from such barbaric activities, Roy says that in 1996 a Human Rights Watch report accuses the Indian military and the government-backed paramilitaries of committing serious and widespread human rights violations in most of its states. So democracy which runs on the laws like the Armed Force Special Power Act (AFSPA) grants the

military wide powers to arrest and the right to shoot to kill and to occupy or destroy property in counter-insurgency operations. Roy states,

Today in many states of India the AFSPA allows not just officers but even junior commissioned officers and non-commissioned officers of the army to use force (even kill) any person on suspicion of disturbing public order or carrying a weapon. On suspicion of nobody who lives in India can harbor any illusion about what that leads to. The documentation of instances of torture, disappearances, custodial deaths, rape and gang rape (by security forces) is enough to make your blood run cold. The fact that despite all this India retains its reputation as a legitimate democracy in the international community and among its own middle class is a triumph.

(Roy 2009: 29)

She points out that much of the historical bloodshed could have been avoided if the post-independence India had lined up to the democratic principles enshrined in its constitution and respected the rights of the nationalities it had taken within its borders. But in the over-zealous efforts to integrate its people into the national mainstream based on the dominant brahminical Aryan culture,

much destruction has been done to the indigenous population. The Indian leaders found it useful to club these ethnic groups with *adivasis* and *dalits* and the minorities like Sikhs and Muslims of the subcontinent. As a result of hierarchical domination within Indian society, the indigenous people are stigmatized by higher castes. Roy says that when victims refuse to be subjects they are called terrorists and are dealt with POTA and AFSPA. There are several cases pending before the Indian Supreme Court which challenge the constitutionality of such laws. Some of the cases have been pending for over nine years under relevant international human rights and humanitarian law standards.

Roy unmasks further in these essays the tyrannical face of the police and their assault on civil liberties and rights. To begin with, she says that encounters were carried out with the intention to cripple the underworld or other terrorist organizations in Mumbai and the disturbed areas such as Punjab and Kashmir. However, most of these encounters were considered by various human rights groups staged and unnecessary because the victims were ready to surrender. Later investigations revealed the controversial nature of these encounters as they were staged either to divert attention of the people from malfunctioning of the police or else to get

promotions. Moreover, what is common in these encounters is their lack of sufficient evidence. And one does not normally believe the concocted stories for justifying these cold-blooded killings. Even if FIRs are lodged, the case generally ends in the dusty shelves of the police or else vapourizes in languid judiciaries. Roy provides the examples of massacres of Mumbai, Chattisinghpura, Pathribal and Barakpora that had left hundreds of civilians dead. Though the commissions were set up and investigations conducted, high promises made to the victims were never fulfilled by the political elite and the judiciary.

In her essays Roy provides a kind of critique on the functioning of the judiciary in India. She advocates that its primary role is to translate democratic principles into honest practices of justice and accountability. She maintains time and again that the judiciary is the backbone of any democratic set up and compares a political democracy without honest judiciary to a body without a brain. It is the judiciary that serves freedom to individuals. She stresses the need that the judiciary must not be subjected to improper influence from the other branches of government: from private or partisan interest groups. A corrupt judiciary annihilates the legitimacy of the state, erodes its sovereignty and capacity to

exercise its sovereign authority over the citizens. As there can be no meaningful constitution in a country without effective and honest judiciary she, while elaborating the functional aspects of judiciary in India, raises some basic questions that are generally neglected or given no importance.

In her essay “Scandal in the Palace” she argues that every branch of government should be accountable to the people and the judges of the Supreme Court should be elected by the consent of the people. In more local venues, however, many judges are directly elected. By taking recourse to the history of democratic judiciary she shows that it is characterized by blatant disregard for the rule of law by both the executive and the legislative. In this regard, even the judges often conduct their respective functions in a manner suggesting that they possess unlimited power or they are above the law. She criticizes their ability to hijack legislation and misinterpret laws created by the representatives of people. She gives the example of the former chief justice of India YK Subharwal who in 2006 ordered the sealing of thousands of shops, houses and commercial complexes, terming them illegal. But the later investigations revealed that his sons, Chetan and Nitin, had

been in partnership with two commercial complex developers who had taken the contract to build malls on the vacated sites.

Besides this, the higher judiciary, especially the Supreme Court, remains more focused on micromanagement than upholding the law. It micromanages our lives, dams, forests, streets, text books and fines for traffic offences. She accuses the court of turning itself into the premier arbitrary of public policy in this country. Since there is no accountability for judges, one cannot register an FIR against a sitting judge without the consent of the Chief Justice, which remains a possible impossibility. That the functioning of the judiciary is improper is pointed out even by the judges themselves. Though Justice SP Bharucha made a public statement about the widespread corruption in the judiciary, nobody took notice of it. Despite all this, Roy says that it has been taken for granted that the priests of judiciary are born angels without having a bit of inclination for evil. Thus their morality and transparency remain unchallengeable in general. One is supposed to turn a deaf-ear to such statements as our judiciary is the judiciary of God. However to safeguard democracy Roy states that it must wake up to its statutory and constitutional responsibilities. For an

effective administration of justice in a democracy, courts have a definite and decisive role to play.

In her other two important essays “Nine is not Eleven” and “November isn’t September” Roy discusses the burning issues of terrorism, Kashmir, and Mumbai attacks of 2008 and relates them to the broader spectrum of international politics. She categorically asserts that nothing can justify terrorism and calls it a heartless ideology. However such attacks cannot be seen in isolation but must be understood in the context of wider issues in the region’s history and society, such as widespread poverty, the partition of India and Pakistan, Gujarat violence of 2002 and ongoing conflicts in Kashmir and Jharkhand. She warns against war with Pakistan arguing that it is hard to pin down the provenance of a terrorist strike and confine it to the borders of a single nation, or state and that it could lead to the descent of the whole region into chaos.

Talking about Gujarat violence, she believes it is time to recognize and admit that atrocities have been committed. She abhors the fact that the state takes delight in perpetrating gross injustices upon its victims in the name of nationalism and democracy. She holds no admiration for any individual or state that has tried to wipe out the weaker beings. America may be the

richest and the most powerful country, Narendra Modi may be a “good” chief minister, Stalin may be a good leader but none of this can redeem them for the grave acts of utter injustice. Roy denounces all, not through didactic moralizing but by simply highlighting the facts. No matter what great feats these men/states may have accomplished, the fact that they have perpetrated or allowed genocide to happen is enough to condemn them. Economic or military or any such achievement cannot acquit them from the responsibility of loss of so many lives.

So the democracy expounded by its founders like Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau has undergone grotesque changes over the centuries. As a result, Roy has developed a kind of discourse on American as well as Indian democracy and argues that in case of America it is imperialism in a new guise and in case of India it is a kind of post-colonial hegemony. Even in the United States there is a growing tendency among its citizens that such hegemony does exist, though covertly. And the role assigned to it is to protect American freedom and interests across the globe at any cost. It is, according to Roy, supported by rightwing power players, militarists, free market ideologues, Jewish neo-conservatives, leaders of Christian and catholic right and anti-socialists. As

regards India democracy, she pleads for a deconstruction of its hegemonic tendencies it has inherited as a legacy from its colonial masters.

Chapter III

An Ordinary Person's Guide to The Empire: Empowerment of the Marginalized

While writing about the suppressive forces of the contemporary world, Roy has explored the existence of a new empire. It consists of a minority-class of elites who after getting elected by the people forget everything except pursuing power and strengthening their grip on it. Its unquestionable power dictates terms to the rest of the world.

Roy describes this empire as having many faces, unlike the other empires of the past. Its reification has evolved in the form of nationalism and corporate globalization. In its stride it takes religious bigotry, terrorism and fascism as its cohorts. It is guarded by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organization and multinational corporations.

As a kind of neo-colonism, it is murkier in its dealings with the contemporary reality. In the colonial era, the rulers would say, "We have colonized you and will kill you". But now the same things happen but under different guises. People are murdered, nations obliterated, cities levelled to the ground but with different

names. Wars are fought in the name of freedom, democracy and the so-called liberal values. The big projects of progress are still run by this empire but underneath are vested interests. What is good for the empire is generalized to such an extent by the propagandistic machinery of the state that it appears to be good for the common people whereas the consequences turn out to be disastrous. In order to confront the oppressive ways of this empire, Roy assigns a new role to the print and electronic media, institutions and social activism for the empowerment of the subaltern.

In this connection, the role of media is important for her. She highlights both its positive and negative aspects. In her essays like “Custodial Confessions” and “The Media and The Law” she critically examines it as an indispensable institution in a free society based on the basic rights of people to acquire relevant and adequate information. Nothing can be more irrational than preventing people from getting information. Any popular government without information or the means of acquiring it is but a prologue to a farce or a tragedy, or perhaps both.

For Roy democracy can be an effective form of government only when the subjects are well-informed about national and international events. They should have the right to think independently and critically about those events. Media is the lifeline of a nation as it provides not only information about what may affect the common man in his day-to-day life, but also by other means that keep him well-informed of new developments. Roy looks at it as a weapon stronger than nuclear weapons as it plays an important role in highlighting the validity and effectiveness of projects taken in hand by popular governments from time to time. It can go deep into the reality of any project and determine its truth or falsehood.

Thomas Jefferson once said that he would prefer a newspaper without a government rather than a government without a newspaper. Media acts as an informer which should supply information in true and unbiased form and let the public choose what may be the best in their interest. It is in this way that media can and does play a crucial role in shaping a healthy democracy. It works as a mirror which shows us the basic truth and harsh realities of life. It helps in preparing a more accountable system. A democracy without unbiased media is like an autocracy.

According to Roy, worldwide news sources are, on the one hand, efficient enough in the art of persuading and manipulating the masses as they create the temper of objective analysis of the news stories they construct. On the other hand, only some are well-skilled in indentifying bias and propaganda in the news spreading in a country. Only a relatively few are able to recognise one-sided portrayal of incidents or find out other sources of information and opinion to compare to those of their main stream news media. In today's world most people are at the mercy of the news media in their own country. It is realised in such a way that it governs people's view of the world. It enables them to identify a country as a friend or as an enemy. In some Arab countries people are shown the outside world the way their governments want to show them through their national media, so they are kept ignorant of the real happenings in the world. Those who understand the conditions under which world media operates have a chance of exerting influence upon them. But mass media is also a vital force in modern culture, especially in the west. Most sociologists refer to it as a mediated culture creating and reflecting different cultures. Societies and individuals are bombarded constantly with messages from a multitude of sources including TV, billboards and magazines, to name a few. These messages promote not only

products, but moods, attitudes and the sense of what is and what is not important. Mass media potentially creates celebrities which work against the interests of the subaltern. According to Roy, in the modern world quick communication and information dissemination play a crucial role in all spheres of the life of a society: personal, social, political and economic.

Roy generally discusses two types of media in her essays: print and electronic. The print media includes a host of publications mostly dailies, weeklies and monthlies which give information about events and provide suggestions and comments by well-learned men. Roy thinks that the written media is the most suitable weapon for intellectuals to use it against the empire. She says that in order to stand united against the propaganda of the empire the masses should be supplied with facts and figures through this form of media to expose the pure political hogwash. Its great advantage lies in spreading news, knowledge and information through the length and breadth of the world. In her essays Roy tells us that there is ample space in it for presenting counter-arguments against false information. She uses it superbly by providing astonishing facts and figures which have resulted in changing the opinions of civil societies about the basic functioning of democracy.

While talking about the importance of the electronic media, she includes news channels, radio, facebook, and twitter. She thinks it is inalienable from governance and is taken as a pillar of democracy in the contemporary world. It is more important than the print media because of its audio-visual effects on the minds of people. Access to true and authentic information is essential to the health of democracy for two important reasons. First, it ensures that citizens are made responsible by putting before them choices instead of acting out of ignorance or misinformation; second, it checks how elected representatives uphold their promises with the people and the oath of offices. It also acts as a mediator between the state and civil society. At the times of crisis the electronic media in a state or country reveals reality without hiding or providing any biased information. In a democratic society it holds a respectable position and if corrupted then, according to Roy, there is no chance of having any basis for vindicating human rights in any democracy.

Roy also stresses in her anthology that the electronic media has the capacity and power to affect all functional areas of democracy and governance. It can keep a check on judiciary, report on court proceedings and promote a legal environment suitable for

press freedom. It can in some cases help in delivering speedy justice to the victims of law and judiciary by highlighting the loopholes and corruption within such institutions. It can build pressure on an elected government, influence its decisions to make them favourable for the common people or the betterment of a country.

While supporting the article 19 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Roy's views on the role of media do not recognise boundaries. It states,

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression without this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of the frontiers.

(Human Rights Report 1948: 10)

In order to promote and maintain real democracy, media should enjoy its own required independence so that it works as a tool for social change. From Roy's point of view, if public interest is not served, then there is no difference between the mute spectators of a game and the media in a democracy. It should enable credible and

diverse voices to contribute to authentic outlets. Such outlets can enable citizens to have access to information for making informed decisions for equitable growth in society. When such demands are not fulfilled, people are automatically alienated from what is happening around them. By representing a plurality of voices media can help in doing away with malpractices and scandals which affect the common man drastically.

While discussing it in her numerous articles and essays she observes that the electronic media can help in setting public agenda and create conducive conditions for the healthy growth of a democracy. William G Davis presents a similar view in his book *The Media's Role in Society: A Statesmen's View (1994)*. He calls it the fourth estate. This phrase refers to the profession of journalism and was derived from the old English idea of three estates: the lords spiritual, the lords temporal and the House of Commons. But the idea that media is the fourth estate rests on its function to act as a guardian of public interest and a watchdog on the activities of government. It is therefore an important component of modern democracy. Similarly Knowlton Nash in his book *The Media's Role in Society: the Media Viewpoint*, says,

That there are all kinds of power centre in any democracy, the judiciary, the government mandarins, the elected representatives, the establishment, the business community and the unions but what binds them all together is the media.

(Nash 1994: 402)

It is only through media that a government can communicate with the governed in any mass sense. Seen as the forth power, it serves as a connecting link between different power centres within a democracy.

Another important function which media can perform is to set trends or agenda to determine what we think and worry about. A perfect example of this is given by Bernard Cohen in his book *The Press and Foreign Policy* in which he says that the press “may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about” *(Cohen 1963: 15)*. So media affects public agenda which in turn affects policy and policy-makers, a process to obtain desired goals. In this way, its power works as an instrument of social change. It sets a nations agenda, focuses public attention on certain

key public issues and can be used to create either confusion or remove misunderstanding.

Traditionally media is called the watchdog of democracy. Its main function is to speak for people, express their concerns and to check the governments. Being loyal to society, it protects democracy, freedom of speech and the basic rights of people. At its best it can help a community in changing circumstances affecting their lives. Roy points out that this is done by probing below and beyond surface information, and by challenging assumptions as assertions, hence invites a civic judgment.

Roy states that by using information as a source of power, media enables us to build national and international opinion. It not only develops mass awareness but also helps in military operations. It can boost the morale of troops by showing the common people supporting their cause. In this sense it can be used as an active weapon against the enemy, especially in the context of information warfare. This is the most sensitive role it plays and if not properly handled it can even legitimate killing of the common people in certain cases.

At the International level, media plays altogether a different role. As mass media, it is supposed to enhance political

transparency and foster accountability on the part of political leaders and pave the way for formulating the policies of a nation in developing the measures of good governance. J M Balkin in his article “How Mass Media Stimulate Political Transparency” says

The media can make the political system more transparent by helping people understand the operations of government, participate in political decisions, and hold govt. officials accountable. It is however worthy of note that the media can be manipulated by politicians by diverting audience’s attention and supplement politics with new realities and crowd out and eventually displays other political realities and political issues (<http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/jbalkin/articles/media0/htm>).

However Roy castigates media at both national and international levels for frequently showing bias and lack of seriousness. She points out that it is largely owned by wealthy individuals and big corporates. They buy media for their personal interests and use it to enhance their corporate greed. More or less, it works as a vibrant organ of the empire of big corporates whose primary goal is to earn as much profit as possible and conduct itself like other corporations when it comes to corrupting the world or domestic politics. Like other corporations, mass media demands the same preferential treatment and have the same desire to grow

without bounds. There is a nexus between big corporates and the powerful media which take care of each other's interests. For example, Fox Corporation Limited was the twelfth largest donor to the Bush campaign and CNN is owned by the parent company Time Warner. It is well said that the freedom of the press is guaranteed only to those who own it. So bias, interest, freedom and some other concerns have, Roy thinks, to be balanced for the emergence of a just society.

Herman and Chomsky in their book *Manufacturing Consent* (1988) support Roy's view by pointing out that US media serves elite interest and subdues democracy. This is done by portraying the world in such a way that the perspective of those entering the political elite becomes acceptable. They generate public consent for the acceptance of US foreign policies and make it difficult for public to have access to information which is important to counter-balance the interests of the elite. They select and reward those who see the world in a similar way. Those who try to bring forth unfriendly facts usually do not have to be censored because most of the times they are not even perceived to exist.

Media reliance on revenue coming from advertisements introduces a further constraint between mass media and interests of

the business class. This greed shapes media display content in order to appeal to rich audiences in whom the advertisers are most interested. So critical and controversial programming is limited because advertisers avoid complexities and controversies that affect the buying mood. Hence money not only talks but also silences. The agenda and framing of news reports on US foreign policy do not therefore deviate from those set by US commercials and the political elite. Manipulation of news media output is controlled by several factors: corporate, advertising, sourcing, and ideology. In this connection, Chomsky says,

The size, ownership and profit orientation of mass media and their shared common interests with other major corporations like banks and governments create a clash of interest between media's supported role as a watchdog of the elite and the interests of that elite.

(Chomsky 1992: 555)

Roy looks at global media as a propagandistic machine of the empire which indoctrinates viewers, readers and listeners alike. It legitimises the crimes committed by it. She gives the example of American media and states that unfortunately most US citizens are carried away by fraudulent reports on NBC, ABC, CNN and other

corporations. According to her, the role of international media was really exposed when it came to the American invasion on Iraq. Media analysts say that Iraq war was fought at two levels, one in the battle field by the soldiers and another in the media rooms by the reporters and journalists. In this war media manufactured the consent by propagating that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction (WMD). The indoctrination process had been at work since the UN had sent its investigators to Iraq to inspect the possibility of Saddam possessing WMD. Even though the inspectors did not find anything there, yet US media found a story which they could “break” for more than three years. Roy lashes out at US media for its lopsided and biased reporting legitimising the Iraq war. About a survey conducted by *The New York Times* and *CBS news* she says that “42% of the American public believe that Saddam Hussain is directly responsible for September 11 Attack on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon”(Times 2004:6). According to an ABC news poll, 55% of Americans believe that Saddam Hussain directly supported the Al-Qaida. The percentage of the American armed forces who believed fabrications could be higher. So the myth of Operation Enduring Freedom propagated in world media was given coverage accordingly.

National media is also hit hard by Roy in her essay “Peace is War” for neglecting its responsibility. She believes that it is obsessed with three C’s: cricket, celebrity and crime. Apart from this, there is nothing on Indian media channels. While criticising the Gujarat government, she found that most TV channels and newspapers had no stories of construction and development to offer and failed to lend voice to the voiceless. Instead, they only promoted the cause of the rich which led her to say,

Unfortunately, the mass media through a combination of ignorance and design has framed the whole argument as one between those who are pro-development and those who are anti-development: it slyly suggests that the NBA is anti-electricity and anti-irrigation. And of course, anti-Gujarat.

(Roy 2006: 104)

Roy further says that the leading newspapers like *The Indian express* and magazines like *India Today* carry auditory pieces full of absurd information. As national media supplies its audiences with false information, fraudulent reports and unchecked figures, the common people are made to form their opinions based on these reports.

While highlighting the role of media in empowering the subaltern, Roy looks at its positive as well as negative aspects. On one hand, it can bring about change in the socio-political spheres of life. On the other, corruption within media adds to the suffering of the common people. She provides a solution to this problem by pointing out that we should stand up and rebut the corporate version and create a universe of alternative information discourse. We need to support independent media like Democracy Now, Alternative Radio and South End Press. The author tries to shake the numbed conscience by narrating different tales of 9/11 and Afghan war in order to remind media of its supposed role in the present era of crisis.

Along with defining the role of media, Roy impresses upon intellectuals to look into the policies and affairs of the empire. They can prepare a front against its ill-designs. The common people are generally unable to realize actual repercussions of the policies which are followed by the empire. They need a guide to be on the right path. Intellectuals can analyze the actions of governments in terms of motives as they are not expressed in the official propaganda. Since the common people are swept away by superficial details, they can lay bare the hidden truths of the empire

and simplify for the naive to understand its functioning. The masters of the empire know that the common people are ignorant and can only help in its evil designs. Roy observes that decisions about state affairs should not be left to “the experts” of the empire, rather its pretention of being the best decision-making body should be deconstructed. In this way she becomes the representative of what Edward Said once said, “There has been no major revolution in modern history without intellectuals; conversely there has been no major counter-revolutionary movement without intellectuals” (*Said1994:10*). This can be done by keeping a watchful eye on happenings around the world. As intellectuals are capable of comprehending what otherwise remains masked in pious rhetoric, they can usher in desired changes needed for the public good.

In this connection, Roy stands out as an intellectual of the mass movement. She not only exposes the ill designs of the empire but also ponders over the causes through which it succeeds in fulfilling its interests. Her role as an intellectual is clearly vindicated when she joined the dam movements in India like the NBA (*Narmada Bachao Andholan*). As a result, its negative effects were highlighted not only at the national level but also at the international level. She analysed the official claims about dams and

brought it under her intellectual scrutiny and showed how the nexus between mainstream politicians and big corporates had benefited them by using the slogan of “progress”. The credit of exposing the ill-effects of nuclear blasts in India also goes to the intellectuals of this country. According to Roy, the Indian government used nuclear blasts as a tool to hide its own failure and diverted the attention of people from actual needs as they were made to believe this act as the pride of the nation. Politicians eulogized this act so much that one who criticised it was taken as a traitor and antinational.

Roy praises intellectuals like Chomsky in her essay “Loneliness of Chomsky” for exposing the war policies of the American government. She believes that Chomsky revealed the real motives and reasons behind the Vietnam War and accordingly fixed the responsibility. The Pentagon papers were carefully prepared but were supposed to have leaked, which provided the United States with a theoretical justification for political and military action in the Vietnam War from 1945 to 1971. This essay reveals how real planning took place and the common people did not know the real motives of this war. Chomsky explained the internal planning and decision-making process within the US

government. Being an honest intellectual, he exposes their real intentions. Similarly, the official bombing of Cambodia in response to the Vietnamese National Liberation Front was only an excuse to attack Vietnam. Chomsky shows that the official claims are nonsense and the real reason of these bombings was to destroy and to suppress communist insurgencies. According to Roy, such insights come to us from the intellectuals of a society and help in countering the hidden designs of the empire.

For Roy institutions like universities too can prove helpful for the empowerment of the subaltern. In fact intellectuals and universities can work together to generate awareness among the common people about their plight. However, it is ironical that they generally delude themselves in believing that they maintain a neutral and critical position. Roy believes that intellectuals and universities should not be commodified like corporations producing industrial commodities. Since a university cannot free itself from the inequalities of the society in which it exists, it is dependent on the values that are upheld in that society and should perform its role accordingly.

Despite several drawbacks, universities have always played a positive role in relation to society. However, such institutions can

contribute to a free society only when they overcome the temptation to conform to the prevailing ideology and the existing structures of power. Roy assigns a responsible role to the intellectuals working in universities as they can conduct radical inquiries into what ails a society. Such research must focus on changing the choices and personal commitments of individuals in the interest of the society and the collective good. They should raise questions against any form of injustice, corruption and other socio-economic malpractices. In this way, intellectuals can help in creating ideal institutions and broaden the scope of non-violent resistance to suppression and exploitation.

While highlighting the functions of universities, Roy wants them to incorporate those texts into the main syllabi that can create awareness on the part of the students about the prevailing conditions. These texts should reveal the ugly face of poverty of damned countries, particularly the exploitation of cheap labour, human trafficking and castigate over-luxurious life-styles of the elite of the world. They must be informative rather than symbolic. Such an attempt can bring about a radical change in youth that will be instrumental in achieving 'revolution through evolution'.

As students form an integral part of intellectualism, they may serve as an active force in bringing about changes which intellectuals envision. Paul Ricoeur, while stressing the importance of French Student's Rebellion in 1968 said that it was their cultural revolution that questioned their world vision, the conception of life underlying political and economic structures and formation of human relations. As a model this rebellion struck at three main roots of injustice: first, it attacked capitalism and its clever agenda in deluding men by its own unjust commitment to quantitative well-being. Second, it opposed bureaucracy because it placed men in the role of slaves in relation to the hierarchy of power structures. Finally, it attacked the nihilism of a society whose aim was just its own cancerous growth. It is through these efforts that a just social order can be achieved. As an important institution, a university can help form social attitudes, develop organizational skills, analyse and transmit knowledge. It becomes a potential base for social change. It can lessen restraints and open up alternatives. All this and more is possible if there is intellectual commitment and empathy within the university.

Another important aspect of positive social change which Arundhati Roy appreciates and preaches in her essay "When Saints

Go Marching Out” is social activism based on non-violent means. She gives a great deal of space to social activism in her essays and projects it as an effective weapon to confront the empire. She elaborates that in order to make this world a peaceful place, the need of the hour is to stand up against the might of the empire with bare hands and march on the streets in every city and shout ‘freedom for all, peace for all’. By giving the examples of Mahatma Ghandi, Martin Luther and Nelson Mandela as the icons of non-violent movements, she wants us to stand for truth and justice and not just celebrate their birthdays and conduct seminars in their names. The real homage to these great saints is to show courage, fearlessness and consistency in confronting the empire. We must develop different ways for our non-violent resistance that must be general and not personal.

In her essays “Ahimsa” and “In memory of Shankar Guha Niyogi” she talks about the heart-wrenching stories of the activists whose hunger strikes stretched over a month. She admires them for raising their voice against corporate greed, thereby setting an example for those who wanted to be the voice of the voiceless. She also knows that non-violent resistance is not enough for changing

the empire, but it is better to raise voice rather than to bear everything like cowards. She says,

We can expose empire and their allies for the cowardly baby killer, water poisoners, and pusillanimous long distance bombers that they are. We can reinvent civil disobedience in a million different ways of becoming a collective pain in the ass.

(Roy 2006: 85)

She clearly suggests that social activists should open new and multiple fronts of non-violent resistance to expose and counter socio-political injustice.

She also pleads for violent resistance whenever and wherever necessary, though her argument is conditional and contextual in nature. In an interview she was once questioned about the armed struggle of Maoists and she categorically refused the words ‘violence’ and ‘terrorists’ to be associated with them. She argues that the people of Chhattisgarh cannot be called as terrorists because they were unwilling to come out of the jungle, their estate. For her after independence the Indian constitution actually perpetuated the colonial law, and decreed that tribal lands belonged

to the forest department. It is a criminalization of the indigenous people and their way of life. Once labelled, a Maoist terrorist can only be shot at sight. In her anthology *Broken Republic* (2011) she says that forms of protest can vary from place to place. She writes,

So gandhian forms of protest in the cities are required. I mean I have nothing against it. I mean just because it is a gandhian protest does not mean protesting for the right cause or asking for the right things. But is a very effective theatre, as Gandhi ji himself showed. But I think it needs an audience and it needs a middle class, a sympathetic middle otherwise if people go on a hunger fast in the Bhatti mines or some other obscure place, then who cares? You need the media, you need the middle class. And you need an audience.

(Roy 2011: 76-77)

Roy also pleads for violent resistance with the condition that if the authorities of the Empire pay a deaf ear to the plea of the suppressed. She talks about it in her latest essay “Walking with the Comrades” which created a wave of unrest in the different parts of the country. The Maoists were banned for being the biggest internal security threat and in 2004 when the ban was lifted, a million people attended their rally in Warangal, Andhra Pradesh. It

is evident that theirs is a mass movement supported by their people. According to Roy, they have emerged from despair as they have been living under sub-human conditions. Even after sixty years of the so-called independence, they have had no access to proper education, healthcare or legal aid. Instead of fulfilling their basic necessities, they have been exploited by the corporal empire. In 2008 a group of experts appointed by the Planning Commission submitted a report called 'Development Challenges in Extremist Affected Areas'. It said that the Maoist movement has to be recognised as a political movement with a strong base among the landless and poor peasantry and *adivasis* who do not even have the right to own property. The media is also hostile to this movement as the press reports released by the Maoists against different acquisitions and their basic problems were ignored by national media. This vicious process has led to their socio-political alienation. As they have established a form of governance of their own called *Gram Swaraj*, Roy thinks it is a viable system which they have developed over the years. She acknowledges that they have certainly created an alternative, if not for others, atleast for themselves.

Since Roy looks at different agencies and institutions as the basic tools to stand against the empire, she stresses sincerity and commitment in order to win the battle against material exploitation, political hegemony, economic inequality and social injustice. For a better future, Roy says, “As for the rest of us, concerned citizens, peace activists, and the like-it is not enough to sing songs about giving peace a chance” (Roy 2006: 9).

Roy’s anthology *An Ordinary Person’s Guide To The Empire* reveals some hidden truths of the brutalities inflicted on the people by its builders. It is dedicated to those who believe in resistance. Hence new methods are given for the empowerment of the subaltern. It prepares mass movements to stand against its might. Naomi Klein aptly says in the review of this anthology that, “reading Roy is how the peace movements arm themselves. She turns our grief and rage into courage.”

Conclusion

The present study is based on the findings and inferences derived from my critical evaluation of the different aspects of marginalization in Roy's nonfictional works. It takes into account how she discovers the interconnected nature of different forms of oppression, exploitation and domination. She writes about these issues both as a feminist and an ideologue. Though her earlier essays like "The Great Indian Rape Trick" is a feminist statement against Shekhar Kapoor's film, *the Bandit Queen*, her later essays show a radical, class conscious commitment to women's rights. Her ideological concerns also include the discourse of globalization and its material manifestation in the form of neo-liberal economic policies. She talks about environmental issues, minority oppression, the condition of slum dwellers and international wars by the US and its allies. Her ideological stance against all forms of exploitation, from minute things to big concerns, transcends the curse of nationalism and xenophobia. She has become the representative of the suppressed earth without bothering about the differences. Bishnu Priya Ghosh in her essay "Tallying Bodies: The Moral Moth of Arundathi Roy's Nonfiction" says,

Roy has been in the business of keeping count of the small things, whose loss goes undocumented in public records. Bodies, livelihoods, histories, homes, dignity, families, languages, rights, health, air, water, limbs, land, rivers, woods, actions and labour. These small things are not from a particular society or country but from the earth itself.

(Prasad 2011: 147)

Nagesh Rao in his essay “the Politics of Genre and the Rhetoric of Radical Cosmopolitanism; or Who’s Afraid of Arundathi Roy,” says that her ideology, apart from other things, includes “resistance to cooperate globalization and the attempt to forge a globalization of dissent from the struggle against big dams in India to the gas and water wars of Bolivia” (<http://www.tandf.co.uk/journalsdoi>).

Roy also ponders on the role of art and assigns the artist the duty to articulate the argument against oppression. The task of such writers, including intellectuals, is to adopt a moral stance so that they play a productive role in society. As a writer cannot separate himself from his socio-political environment, he/she should awaken the conscience of the masses to bring about positive

change. Her views on art are clearly shown in her essay “The Ladies have Feelings, So shall We Leave it to Experts?”

Rule one for a writer, as far as I’m concerned, is that there are no rules. And rule two (since rule one was made to be broken) is that there are no excuses for bad art. Painters, writers, actors, dancers, singers, film makers, musicians-they are meant to fly, to push at frontiers, to worry the edges of human imagination, to conjure beauty from the most unexpected things, to find magic in places where others never thought to look...a good or great writer may refuse to accept any responsibility or morality that society wishes to impose on him/her. Yet the best and greatest of them know that if they abused this hard won freedom, it can lead to bad art. There is an intricate web of morality, rigour and responsibility that art, that writing itself, imposes on a writer.

(Roy 2002: 191)

Roy asserts that just because she writes and thinks in English does not mean that she is less an Indian than she was before her recognition as a writer. She argues that she simply writes what she thinks and believes in. She suggests that an author’s writing is not necessarily guided by any culture. Since she is bilingual, it is natural for her to think in two languages. Ismail Talib in his book

The Language of Post-Colonial Literature: An Introduction states, “That for Roy being forced to identify with conqueror, especially with a departed conqueror, is like being the child of raped mother” (*Ismail 2002:15*). The use of the English language is merely a tool she chooses to tell the story of sufferers. She uses it masterfully to create a voice that may not have been used so clearly before.

Her prose is simple, vivid and candid. Unlike others, it is less ambiguous and more transparent. She does not problematize issues, rather offers viable solutions, though ideal, to negotiate with what appears to be mystifying and opaque. She depicts the real picture of people in such a way that her sentences recreate the situation in the reader’s mind. Her diction is charged, provocative and moving. Her emotional outburst and anger against the threat of an impending nuclear holocaust in the following passage is a fine example of making personal what looks remote and distant,

The bomb isn’t in your backyard. It is in your body. And mine. *Nobody*, no nation, no government, no man, no god, has the right to put it there. We are radioactive already, and the war hasn’t even begun. So stand up and say something. Never mind if it has been said before. Speak up on your own behalf. Take it very personally.

(*Roy 2002:12*)

The passage shows that Roy is a very serious writer and she wants that her concerns are shared by her readers also. In her essay “War is Peace” she criticizes the Bush regime in a penetrating and mocking tone when she says, “With all due respect to President Bush, the people of the world don’t have to choose between the Taliban and the US government” (Roy 2002: 248).

She does not use the English language as a readymade garment, rather recreates it by letting the dynamics of her native sensibility work through it as spontaneously as possible. She mixes Urdu and Hindi utterances with English sentences without any explanatory notes or bracketed meaning. Visalakshi Memon describes this multilingual tendency in her essay as “typical of a new style in Indo-Anglian writing”. As adherence to Queen’s English is no more the norm, she praises Chomsky by using the Urdu phrase *Chomsky zindabad*. While criticizing the exploitation of the poor by big corporations, she sarcastically says, *mera bharat mahaan*.

She has stoutly and wittily defended herself from her critics on many issues ranging from her involvement in socio-political and economic affairs to her style of expression. Bishnu Priya advocates her cause and points out that her hyperbolic style is a merit in her

nonfiction. Her diverse political, moral, social and religious viewpoints have also generated enough controversial heat but most critical opinions are however appreciative of the rhetorical power and originality of her language. Gillian Beer, a distinguished professor of English at Cambridge, comments that Roy's language skills reflect 'extraordinary linguistic inventiveness'. Likewise Jason Cowley appreciates her "verbal exuberance". Though her stylistic inversions or deviations from the standard English have angered many critics for her unconventionality, Mallikarjun Patil in his book *Raja Rao and Arundathi Roy's Indianization of English* says, "Roy has enriched the English language but as a standard-bearer or trend-setter will mislead our future writers as well as language users". C D Narsimhaiah accuses her for "busy peddling of words" (*Patil 1999: 127*).

Her use of irony, parody, personification and parallelism along with graphological sentences and heavy punctuation marks have added a new and novel dimension to Indian English prose writing. At her hand these devices become emotive in highlighting the plight of the subaltern. The main concerns of her writing may or may not be new but the way of articulating them is altogether new and original. She uses titles of her essays so brilliantly that

they arrest our attention instantly. There is an urgency at work which prepares one to commit and sympathize.

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